AN UNDERGROUND COLLECTION

Anger's Lurid Images

BY EDWARD GUTHMANN

IN HIS WILDEST, most arcane and lavish dreams, filmmaker Kenneth Anger couldn't possibly have created a figure as devilishly bizarre as himself. The 53-year old Anger, who is represented this Tuesday night by his "Magick Lantern Cycle" at San Francisco's Strand Theatre, began as a child actor, playing the changeling prince in Max Reinhardt's 1934 film of "A Midsummer Night's Dream."

As an adolescent, he was Shirley Temple's cotillion partner, and at age 17 became the enfant terrible of the art world with "Fireworks," a remarkably frank homosexual fantasy that was filmed in his parent's Hollywood home while they were out of town for the weekend.

Anger's notoriety peaked with the publication of "Hollywood Babylon," an outrageous, intentionally lurid expose — "painstakingly researched," the author claimed — of the private lives and sordid deaths of Hollywood's tainted royalty. Originally published in Paris in 1959, "Babylon" became, in critic Susan Sontag's words, "a book as legendary as its subject."

Far more than scandal-monger or celluloid exhibitionist, though, Anger is a respected pioneer of "underground" film. His "Magick Lantern Cycle" is actually a collective title for nine different films spanning 33 years — ranging from "Fireworks" (1947) to "Scorpio Rising" (1965), a homoerotic look at leather-worshipping motorcyclists, and culminating with "Lucifer Rising" (1974-1980), an abstract "birthday party for the Aquarian Age."

"Fireworks," which won the teenage Anger praise from Jean Cocteau as a fellow poet, featured the director as a youth who picks up sailors, has sex with them, and then receives a beating. "This flick," Anger later said, "is all I have to say about being 17, the U.S. Navy, American Christmas and the Fourth of July."

The last minutes of "Fireworks" depict the sailor cradling Anger in his arms, followed by a close-up of the sailor's fly, which unzips to reveal a sparkling Roman candle. Tennessee Williams called "Fireworks" "the most exciting use of cinema that I have ever seen."

Kenneth Anger: Frank homosexual fantasies

Anger followed "Fireworks" with "Puce Moment" (1949, 6½ min.), a dreamy epitaph for faded Hollywood glamour; and "Rabbit's Moon" (1950, 8 min.), a poetic retelling of Anger's own suicide attempt that year. Made

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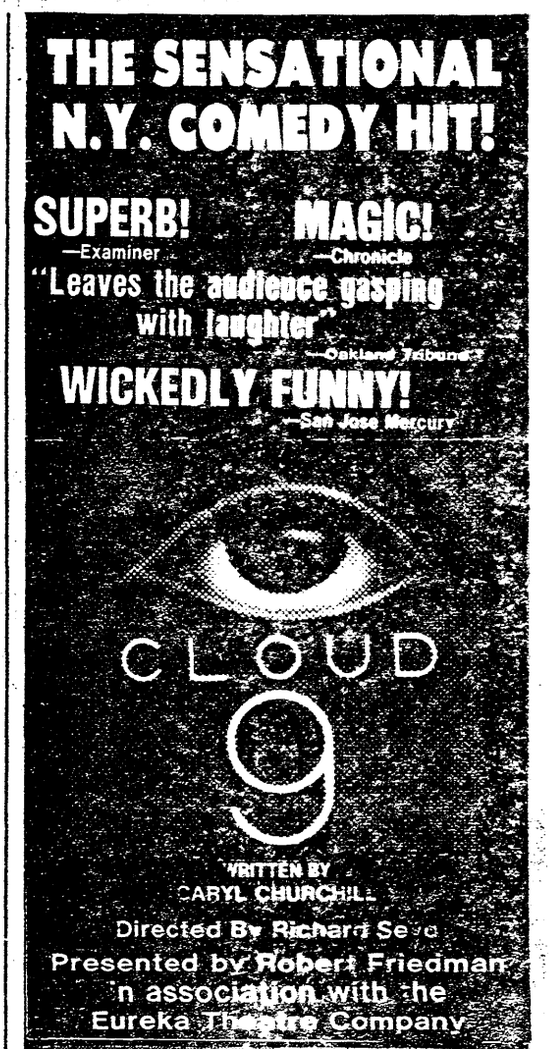
Kenneth Anger's "Magick Lantern Cycle" will be screened all day Tuesday at the Strand Theater on Market Street in San Francisco.



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